



Genesis of the NDR

The Hammer and Sickle emblem of the communists, invented in 1917, is a **symbol of class alliance** between two distinct classes: proletarian workers, and peasants.

Peasants often work hard and they are often poor, but they are not the same as the working proletariat of the towns. Nor are they the same as the rural proletariat.

So the hammer and the sickle are not two equal things. They represent two different things, allied.

Practical class politics is always a matter of alliance, and in different circumstances, different alliances are called for. Communists commonly regard an alliance between workers and peasants as normal. But proletarian parties have also made class alliances with parts of the petty-bourgeoisie or

national bourgeoisie, against feudalism or against colonialism.

Alliances are normal and necessary, in order to isolate and thereby to defeat an adversary, and equally, to avoid being isolated and defeated by the adversary. Therefore, the question of the appropriate alliances in the anti-colonial and anti-Imperialist struggle was bound to arise.

The origin of the specific type of class alliance that is nowadays referred to by the term **National Democratic Revolution** can be precisely located in the Second Congress of the Communist International (2CCI), in the discussion on the National & Colonial Question, reported by V. I. Lenin on 26 July 1920 (attached), less than three years after the Great October Revolution in Russia, a revolution based on a worker-peasant alliance.

The founding Congress of the Communist International (“Comintern”) took place in March, 1919, a little more than a year after that October 1917 Russian Revolution, of which it was an integral consequence. The setting up of the Communist International was a demand that was part of Lenin’s “[April Theses](#)”.

The first “International Working Men’s Association”, of which Karl Marx had been a founder member in 1864, had faded after 1871 following the fall of the Paris Commune. The Second International fell apart in 1914, when most of the Social-Democratic workers’ parties backed the bourgeois

masters of war in the conflict between the Imperialist powers.

The communists, led by Lenin, had held out against that betrayal. After the revolutionary victory in Russia they lost very little time before constructing a new International. The Third, Communist International was naturally and explicitly anti-Imperial and anti-colonial, but it explicitly, carefully, and out of necessity, extended the revolutionary alliance to include parts of the bourgeoisie.

In his report to the 2CCI on the National & Colonial Question, Lenin says:

*“We have discussed whether it would be right or wrong, in principle and in theory, to state that the Communist International and the Communist parties must support the bourgeois-democratic movement in backward countries. As a result of our discussion, we have arrived at the unanimous decision to speak of the **national-revolutionary movement** rather than of the ‘bourgeois-democratic’ movement. It is beyond doubt that any national movement can only be a **bourgeois-democratic** movement, since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consist of **peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships**... However, the objections have been raised that, if we speak of the bourgeois-democratic movement, we shall be obliterating all distinctions between the reformist and the revolutionary*

movements. Yet that distinction has been very clearly revealed of late in the backward and colonial countries...”

In this report we find, for the first time all together, the makings of the NDR, including the name, even if the words are not quite in their present-day order. Lenin calls it “national-revolutionary”, but he makes it very clear that he is talking of a democratic class alliance with anti-colonial, anti-Imperialist elements of the national bourgeoisie in colonial countries.

The 2CCI was followed within two months by the famous [“Congress of the Peoples of the East”](#), in Baku, in the southern part of what was soon to become the Soviet Union. This 1920 event was the first international anti-colonial conference, and it had huge consequences. We will deal with the Congress of the Peoples of the East in the next instalment, as a contribution to the discussion of the realisation of the NDR, the concept which had been laid down in Lenin’s report.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Report on National and Colonial Question, 2CCI, Lenin](#).
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